12 November 1918: The war is over!

The Guardian reported:

London lets itself go!

The maroons that in the bad nights of the past beat like blows on a drum like fate gave the news to London at eleven o’clock this morning and sounded the overture of rejoicing.

The guns boomed over the heavy grey sky, and everyone knew that the last guns had been fired on the home front. Before the sound had died away innumerable people rushed onto the streets from house, factory, workshop and children helter-skelter from their schools crying “The war is over!” In a few minutes all over London the little boys in red with the bugles who used to send us to bed when the Gothas had gone were starting out, blowing the cheery “All clear” for the war. The trains on all the lines carried on the note with a wheezy shriek of delight. The fat tugs on the river tried to play a tune on one note and with all these noises mingled the first wail of cheers that in every short time grew loud enough to drown the maroons.

Then the church bells, that we never dared to ring, but once on any great day of the war, burst into a confident ringing. Big Ben over all, letting themselves go, like all London below them. The bells acted like a beaten tin summoning a swarm of bees.

The crowd gathered momentum in the most extraordinary way. In five minutes there wasn’t an office window without a glaring new flag until the street looked as if prepared for a medieval pageant. Children went singing westward leading a song procession from east to west that went on getting busier and more cheerful throughout the day. Like magic, the buses converted themselves into moving grandstands for the show.

The first instinct of the crowd took it to the seat of Government and Downing Street which was quickly besieged by a sample of war-time London. They had not long to wait before Mr Lloyd George appeared. He came out on to the doorstep of Number 10 almost before the maroons had finished and stood there with uplifted head, smiling at the crowd. As soon as he could be heard, he said: “I am glad to tell you that the war will be over at eleven o’clock today.”